



Mecklenburg County
Park and Recreation

W. Lee Jones, Director

FY2022

Mecklenburg County Board of County Commissioners Budget Retreat Presentation





Presentation Outline

Topic	Time Allotted
Department Overview	5 Minutes
Part 1: Meck Playbook Master Plan	15 Minutes
Commissioner Questions & Comments	10 Minutes
Part 2: Park Equity & Operating Funding	15 Minutes
Commissioner Questions & Comments	10 Minutes



Mecklenburg County
Park and Recreation

Department Overview

Mission & Scope of Services

Mission Statement

Enhancing community wellness through recreation, community space and natural resources.

Divisions

Administration

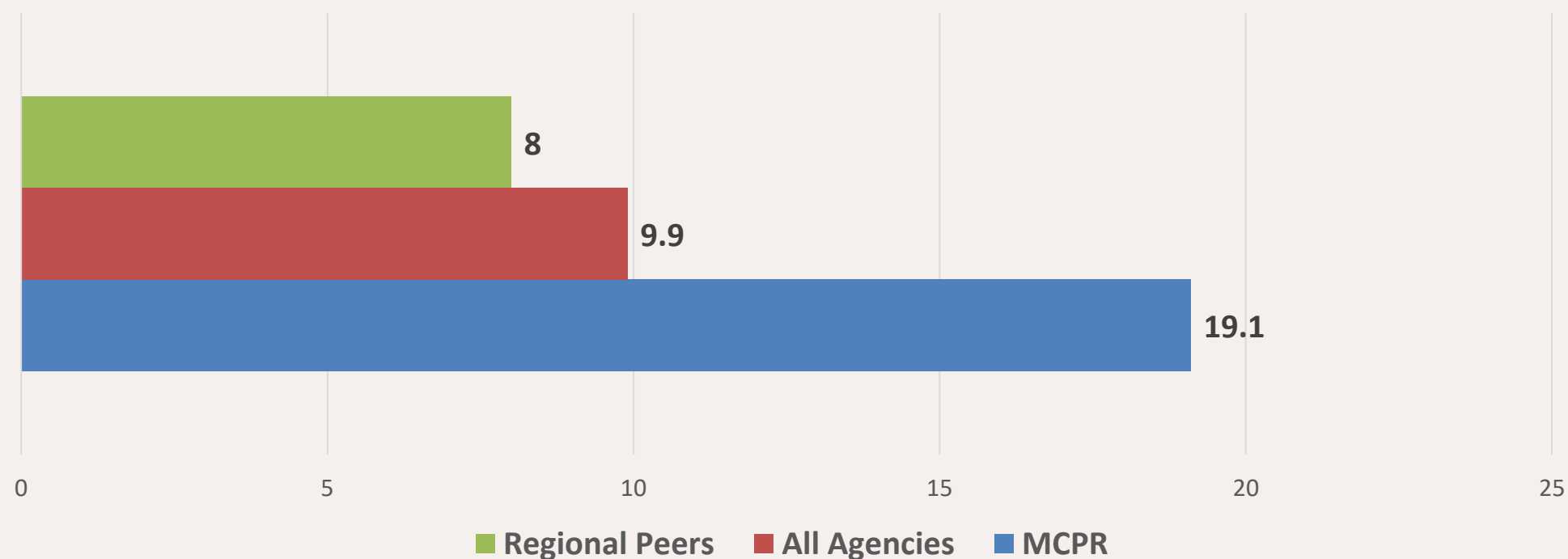
Capital Planning

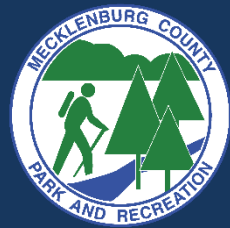
Community & Recreation Center Services

Nature Preserves & Natural Resources

Operations & Maintenance

Acres of Parkland/1000 Residents



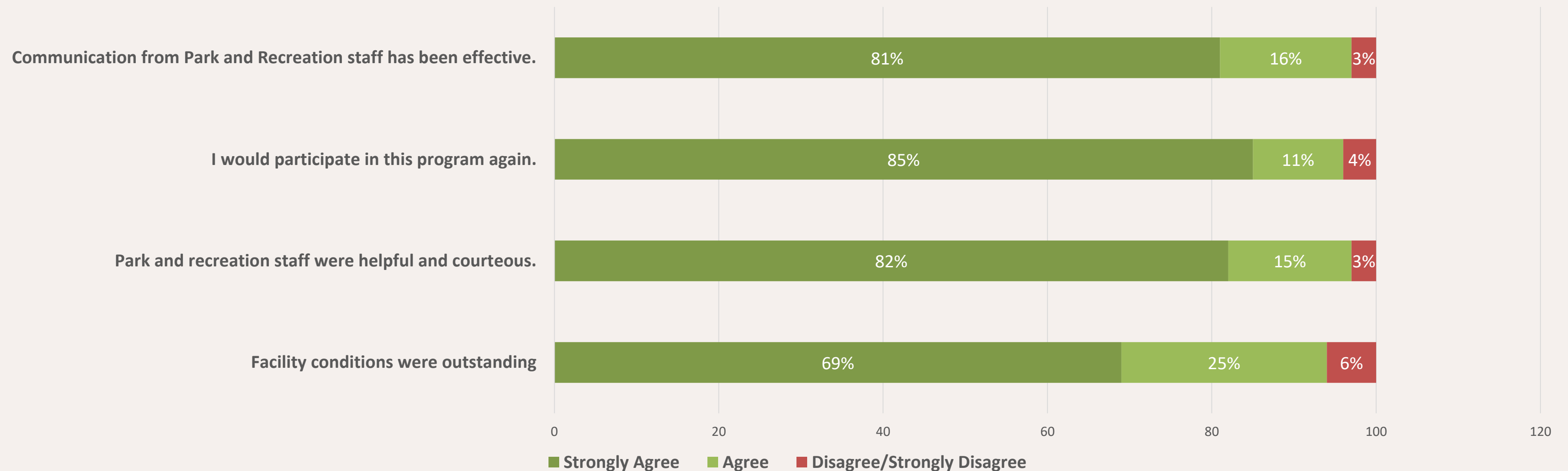


Department Overview

Customer Satisfaction

Area residents consistently provide positive feedback to staff about the quality of Mecklenburg County parks, nature preserves and recreational facilities.

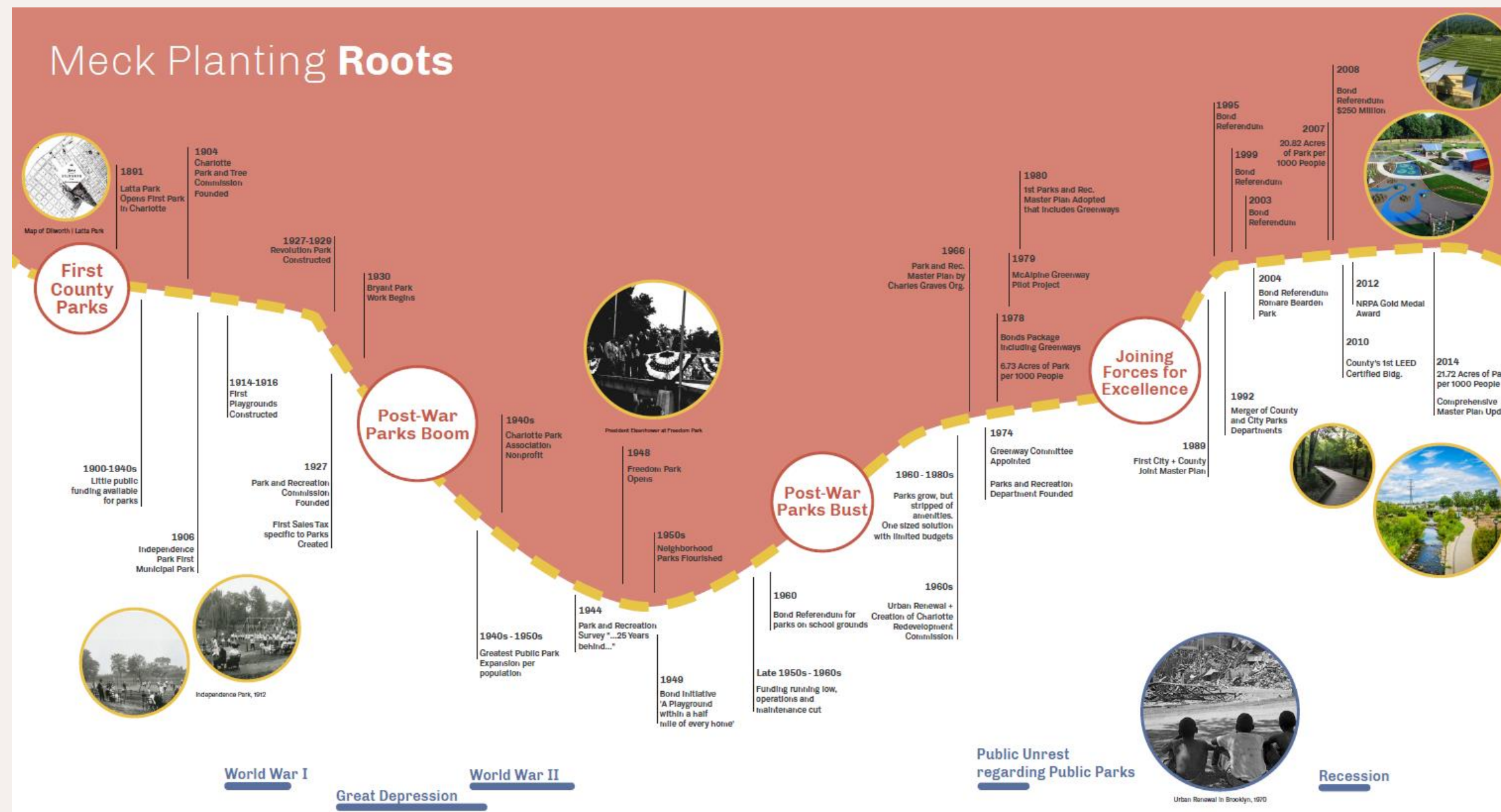
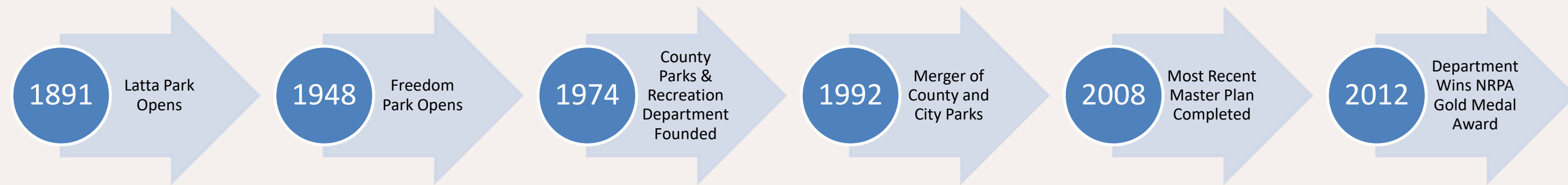
- In the Mecklenburg County 2020 Annual Community Survey, **91%** of respondents rated the overall maintenance of Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation facilities as “Excellent” or “Good.”
- Additional data from Department Customer Satisfaction Surveys is graphed below.

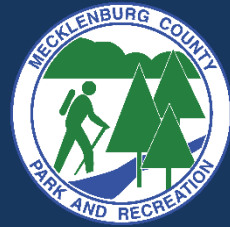




Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation

Department Overview *History*





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Part 1: Meck Playbook Master Plan





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Park and Recreation Master Plan

Master Plan Definition & Precedent

What is a Master Plan?

A Master Plan is a document that provides organizations with a long-term roadmap for development.

It assists leadership with identifying priorities, strategies and needs. At Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation, a Master Plan facilitates the anticipation of future recreation trends, adaptation to the needs of an evolving community and alignment of maintenance investment with capital spending.

Department History

The Department developed its first Comprehensive Master Plan in 2008 but Departmental Master Planning efforts date back to 1989. A subsequent formal update document was completed in 2014.

These plans have ensured that the County has consistently maintained a clear, supported vision for our parks and recreation system, described through a visual framework and actionable steps.

Current Efforts

Industry standards recommend developing Master Plans at least every 10 years. Therefore, the Department's newest Master Plan is currently under development.

Meck Playbook will guide the Department's growth, programming and messaging over the next 10 years.

Meck Playbook
Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation
2020 Master Plan





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Meck Playbook

Plan Components





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Meck Playbook

Methodology: Community Input



COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS

1,223

memories and ideas
shared in workshops



255+

Workshop
Participants



FOCUSED CONVERSATIONS

88

participants in four
focus groups

9

community
pop-ups



SURVEYS + POLLS

412

online surveys and
mini-polls taken

800

surveyed
households

12

Fishing for
Suggestions posters
in Rec Centers



SOCIALLY DISTANT OUTREACH

2,600

website
visits





Meck Playbook

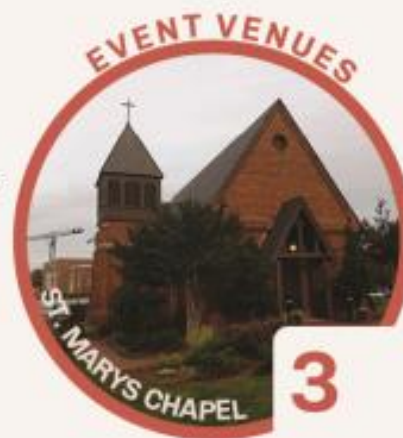
Methodology: Assessment



PARKS



40 of these parks (2,805 acres) are landholdings that serve ecological purposes! Some of these are earmarked for future parks.



FACILITIES



9 of these facilities are under construction and coming soon!





Meck Playbook

Methodology: Assessment

Park Rating System

	GOOD		ACCEPTABLE		POOR		
	A	B	C	D	F	Y	Z
State of the Park (Urgency of Need)	Outstanding asset of the system	Good, but some upgrades needed	Decent, can benefit from upgrades	Needs urgent attention	Needs immediate attention	UNDER CONSTRUCTION	PARKLAND RESERVE
Visible wear	New or newly renovated	Shows use	Worn but not broken	Very worn, visually neglected	Extensive neglect		
Equipment functionality	Highly functional, new equipment	Highly functional, used, but not worn	Functional, dated equipment	Dated equipment	Broken equipment, safety hazard		
Paths & paving	New paths, paving	Functional path network	Usable paths	Eroded paths, cracked pavement	Broken or absent paths		
Assets	Many assets	Has a lot to offer	Basics	Bare	Few or no assets		
Cohesiveness (overall design intent)	Uniform vision and design	Logical design	Divided with half new and half requiring attention	Disjointed	Lack of intent or design		
Visibility/Signage	Clearly marked entrances, visible signage	Signage and entrances clear	Signage and entrances visible	Signage worn, entrances present	Signage broken, entrances hard to find		
Accessibility				Not ADA Accessible	Not ADA Accessible		



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Meck Playbook

Initial Findings: Priority Communities

As part of the “Discover” phase of Meck Playbook, an assessment of Department facilities was conducted to identify sites for park improvements and/or land acquisition.

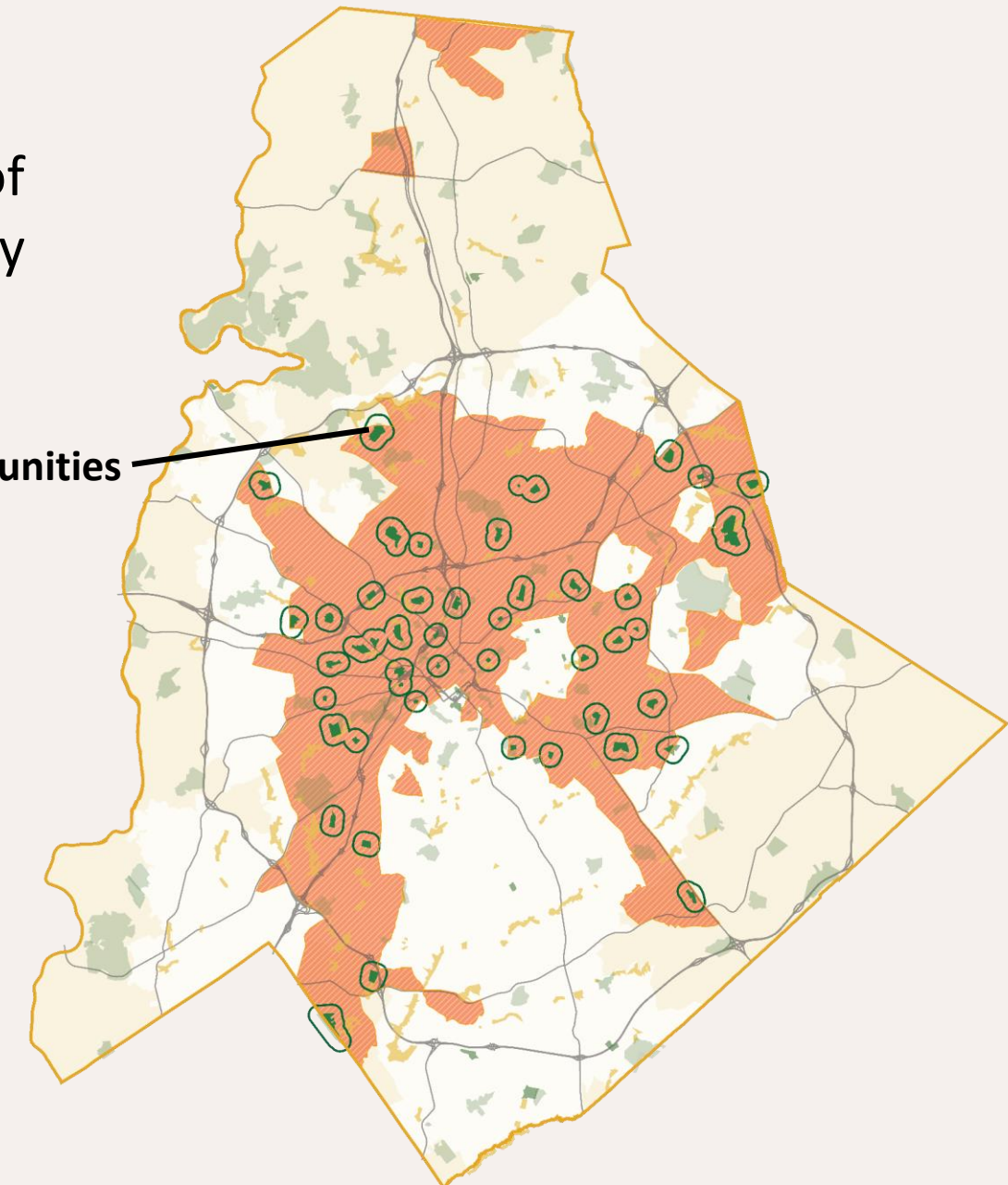
Based on initial analysis, there is a significant correlation between the level of improvements needed within parks and their location within priority communities.

Priority Communities are defined by:

- High rates of rentership
- Lower than average household income
- High youth and senior population
- High non-white resident population

The identified priority communities mapped here may take priority for investment or reinvestment in the coming years.

Priority Communities





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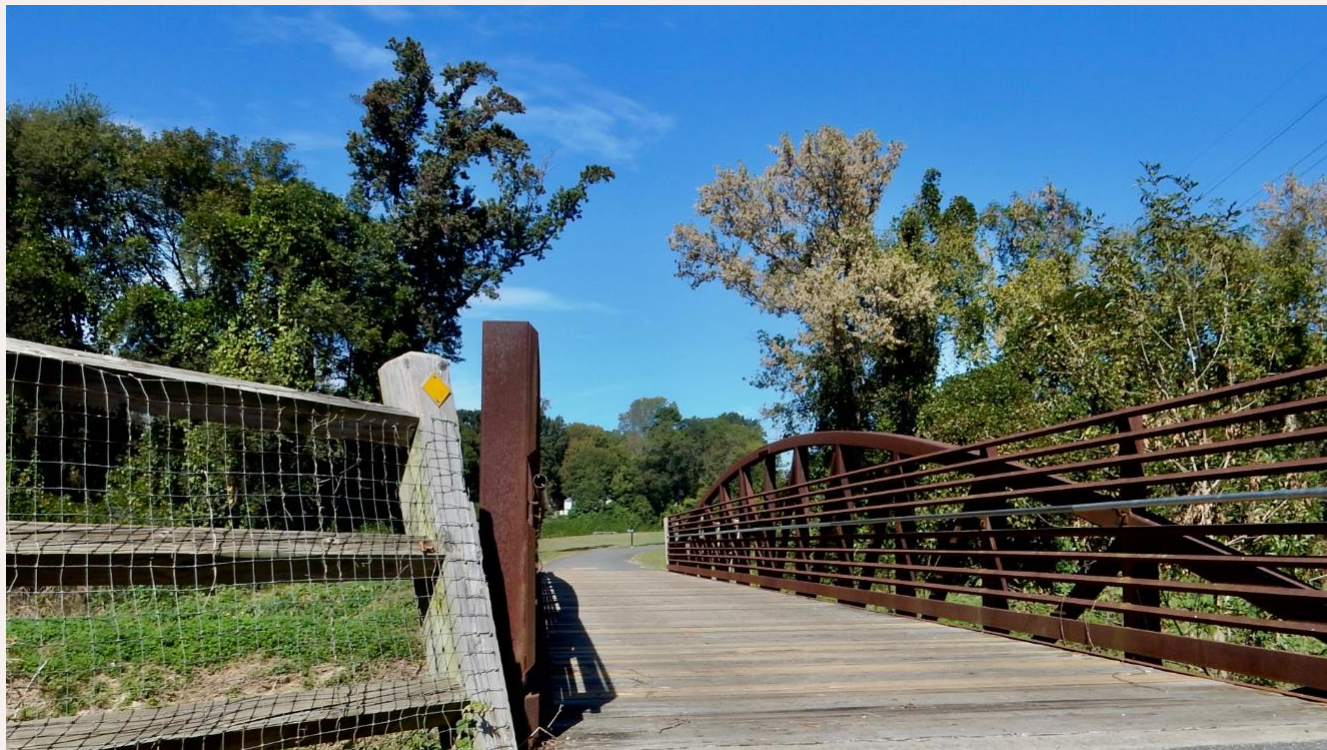
Meck Playbook

Findings: Gaps & Acquisition Opportunities

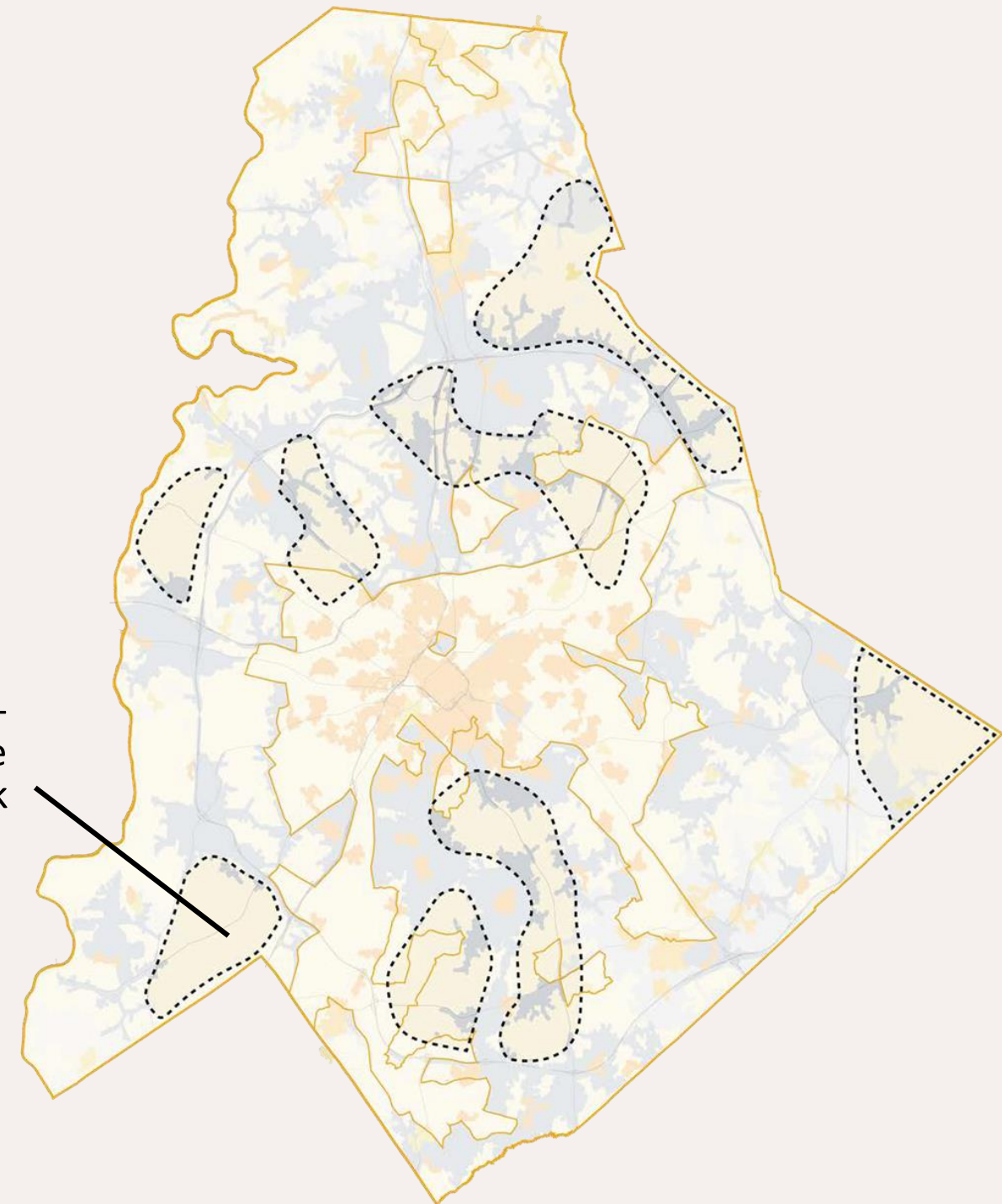
The system assessment also included an analysis of potential gaps in parkland availability across the County.

The zones mapped here have been identified through spatial analysis as occurring outside a 10-minute commute to a park facility.

This map displays zones where additional land acquisition may be prioritized.



Zones beyond a 10-
minute commute
to a park





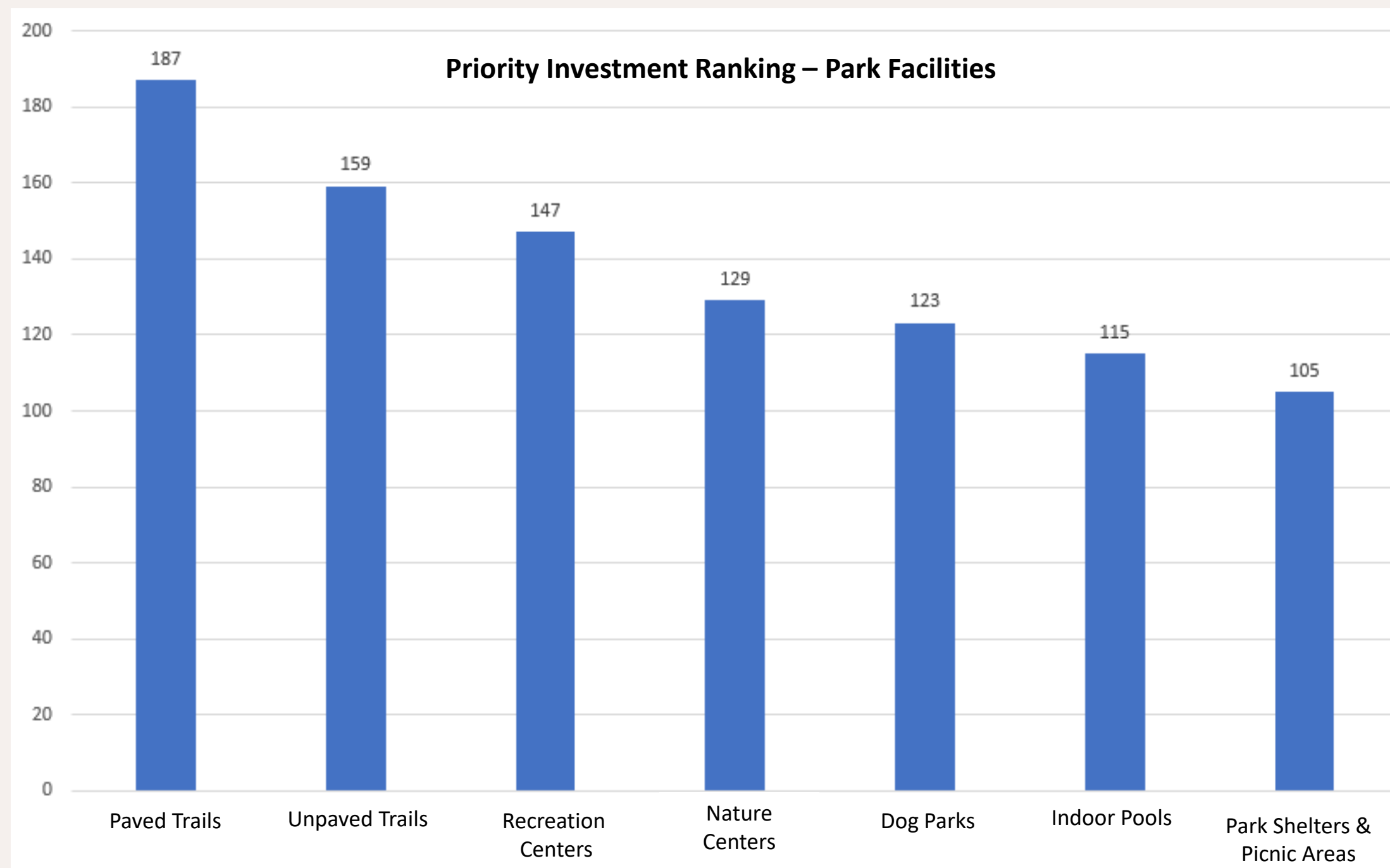
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Community Priorities *Facilities*

Statistically Valid Survey

As part of Meck Playbook, 800 households were surveyed. These households represent a diverse sampling of Mecklenburg County residents, by age, gender, household size and race/ethnicity.

PIR (Priority Investment Ranking) An index that equally weighs the importance residents place on facilities and the number of residents with unmet needs for facilities.



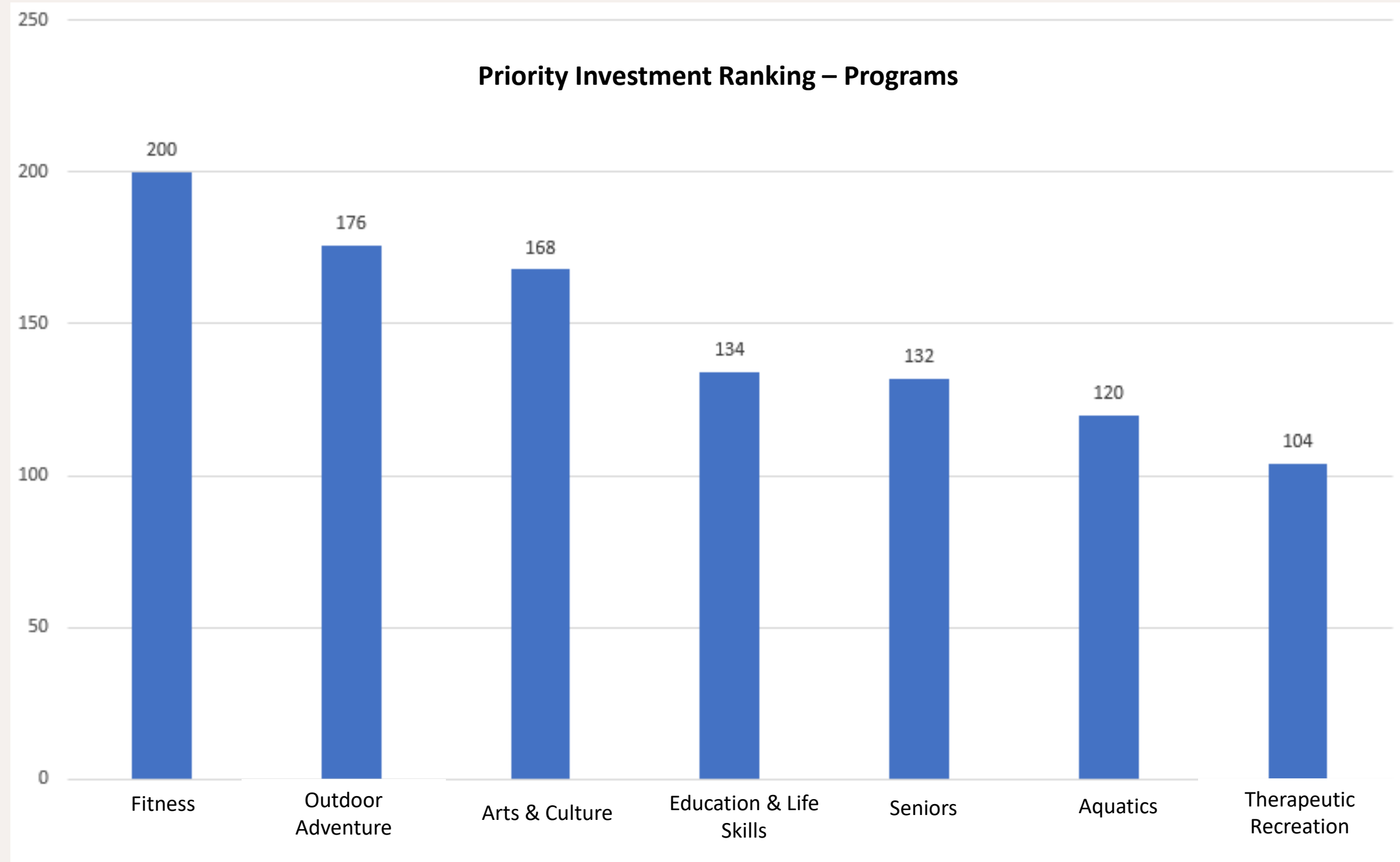
Of 20 potential categories, the facility categories above were identified as “High Priority.”



Community Priorities *Programs*

Program Definitions

- **Fitness:** Focuses holistically on individual well-being and health. Examples: aerobics, tai chi, Pilates.
- **Outdoor Adventure:** Outdoor recreational activities that take place in natural areas. Examples: kayaking, camping, hiking.
- **Arts & Culture:** Creative activities and performances. Examples: painting, theater, music.
- **Education & Life Skills:** Activities associated with language and/or technology. Examples: speech, poetry, STEM, computer science.
- **Seniors:** Activities for individuals aged 55 or older.
- **Aquatics:** Activities done in water. Examples: learn-to-swim, water safety.
- **Therapeutic Recreation:** A recreation, sports or wellness program, including those listed above, designed specifically for participants with disabilities.



Of 14 potential categories, the program categories above were identified as “High Priority.”



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Meck Playbook

Guiding Principles





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Meck Playbook

Implementation Goals

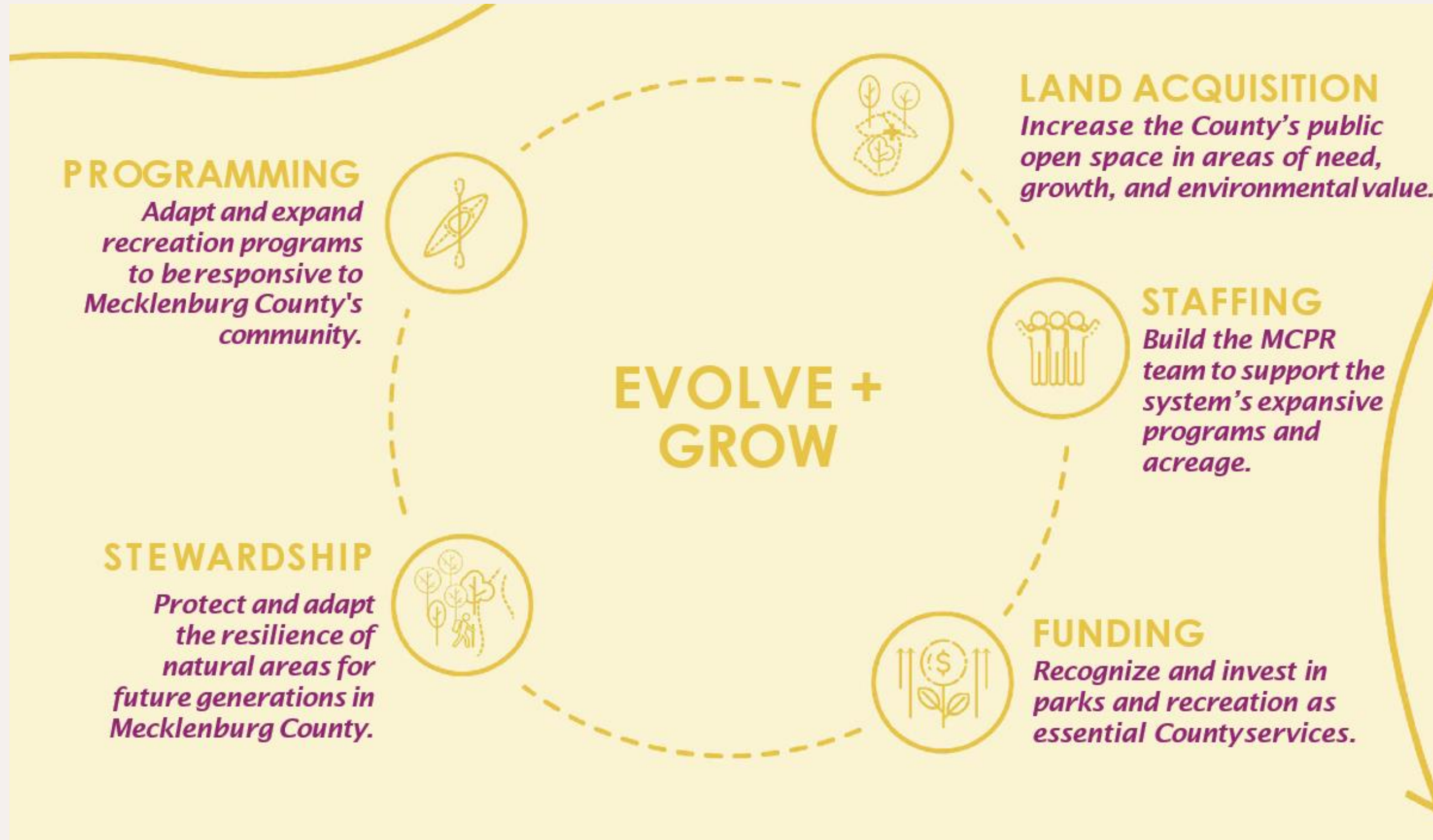




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Meck Playbook

Implementation Goals

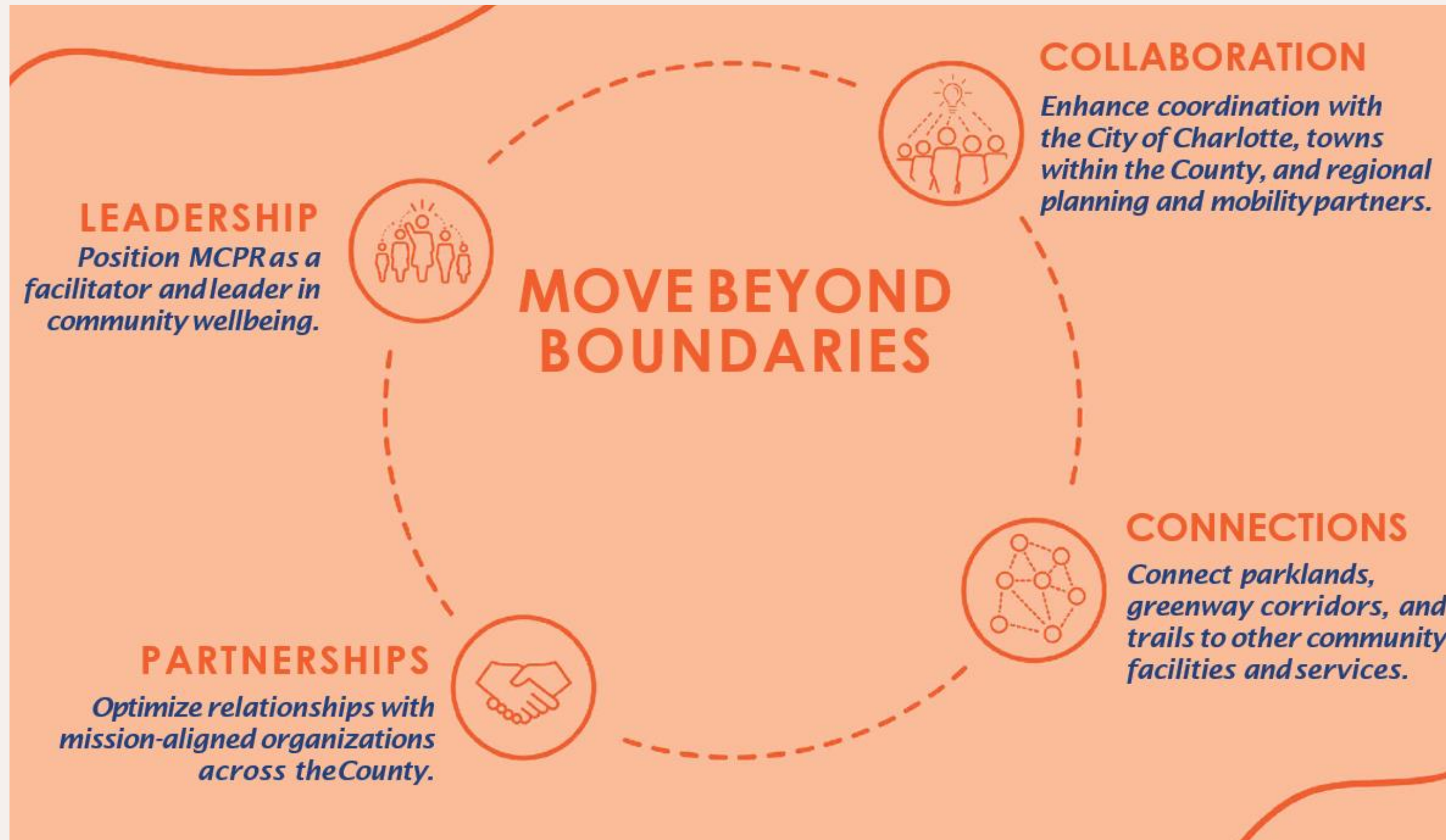




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Meck Playbook

Implementation Goals

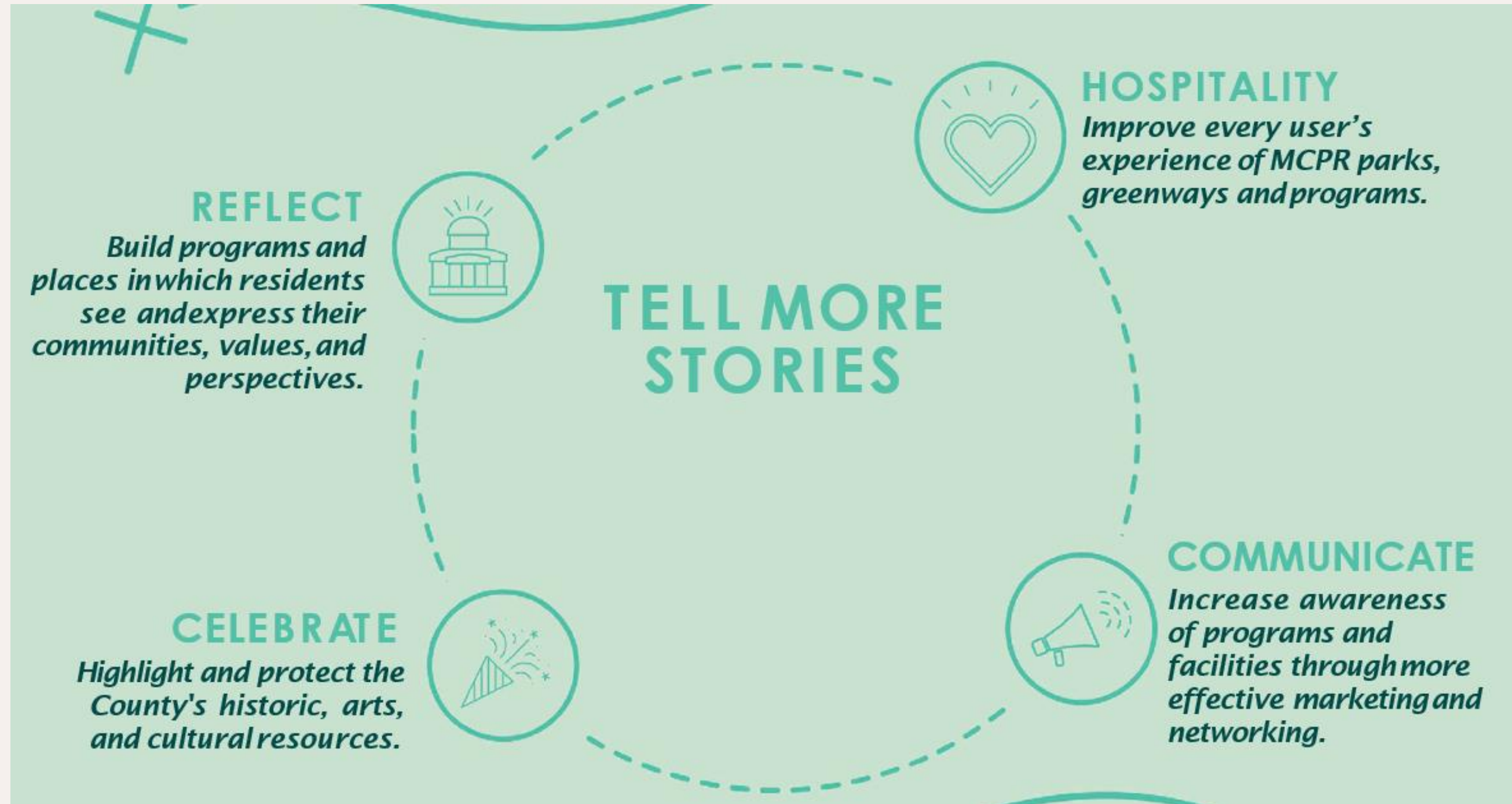




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Meck Playbook

Implementation Goals

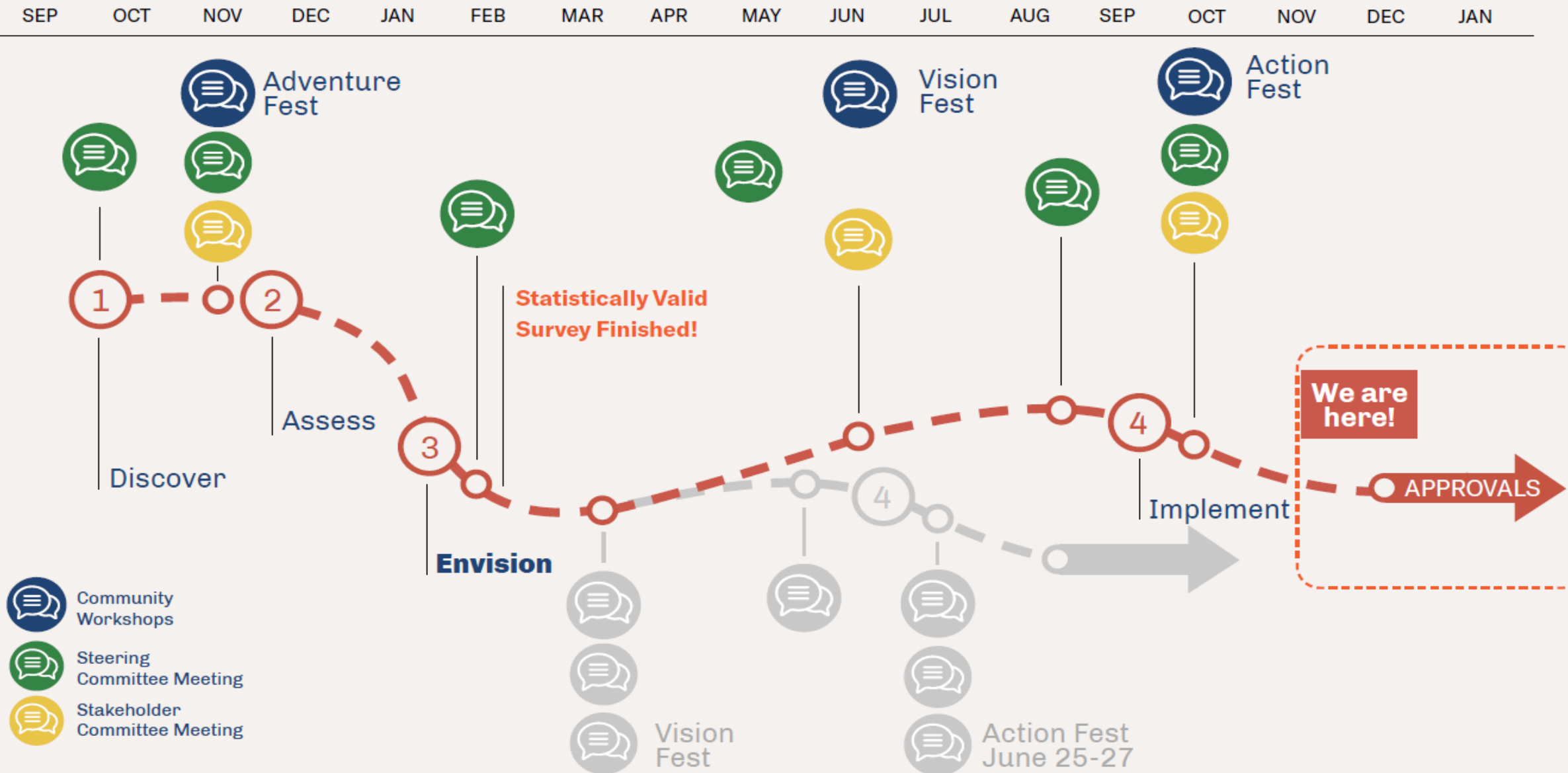




Meck Playbook Timeline

2019

2021



Next Steps

- **Ongoing:** Steering and Stakeholder Committee Draft Review
- **January/February 2021:** Complete recommendations for investments, staff and other initiatives
- **February 2021:** Final Draft
- **Spring 2021:** BOCC Presentation





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Commissioner Questions & Comments



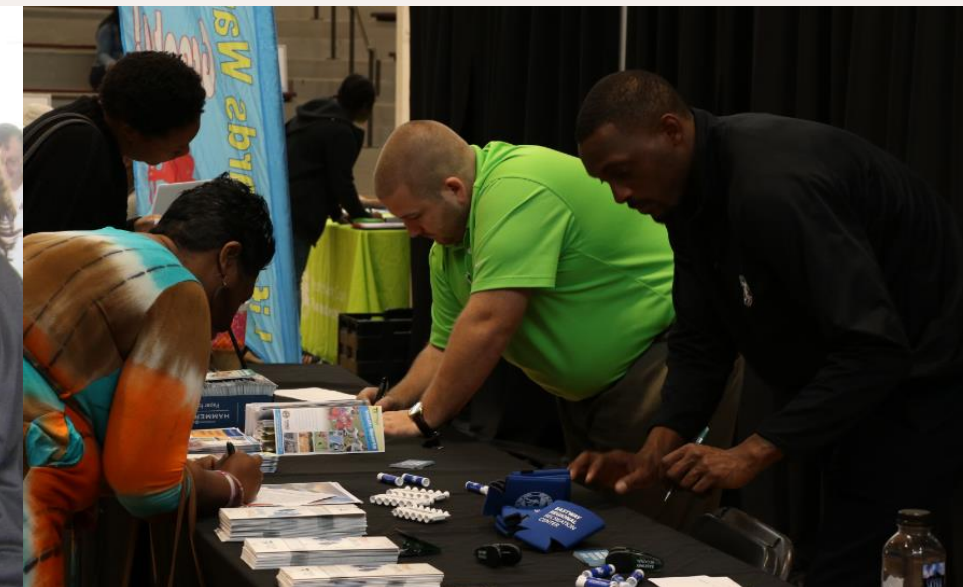


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Part 2: Park Equity & Operating Funding

With Meck Playbook as our guiding roadmap, we now transition to a discussion of the costs associated with recommended improvements.

Initial findings from Meck Playbook results suggest that Park and Recreation requires significant investment in its operations and facilities. This assertion is corroborated by evidence from the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA).





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Equity in Park and Recreation

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) and Mecklenburg County have both articulated support for and prioritization of funding and strategic initiatives to promote equity as part of their practice.

As such, Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation is committed to providing access to parks and recreation spaces for all county residents, regardless of their demographic characteristics or place of residence.

Meck Playbook Guiding Principle #1, “Commit to Equity,” provides a framework for achieving equity through investment and community engagement.



Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation is committed to ensuring that the QUALITY of parks is equitable across the entire County!

Quality is defined as 1) Park Infrastructure, 2) Recreational Amenities, 3) Visual/Aesthetic Factors and 4) Park Safety.

(Zhang et al, 2021)

Equity Tools



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Capital Improvement Plan (CIP)

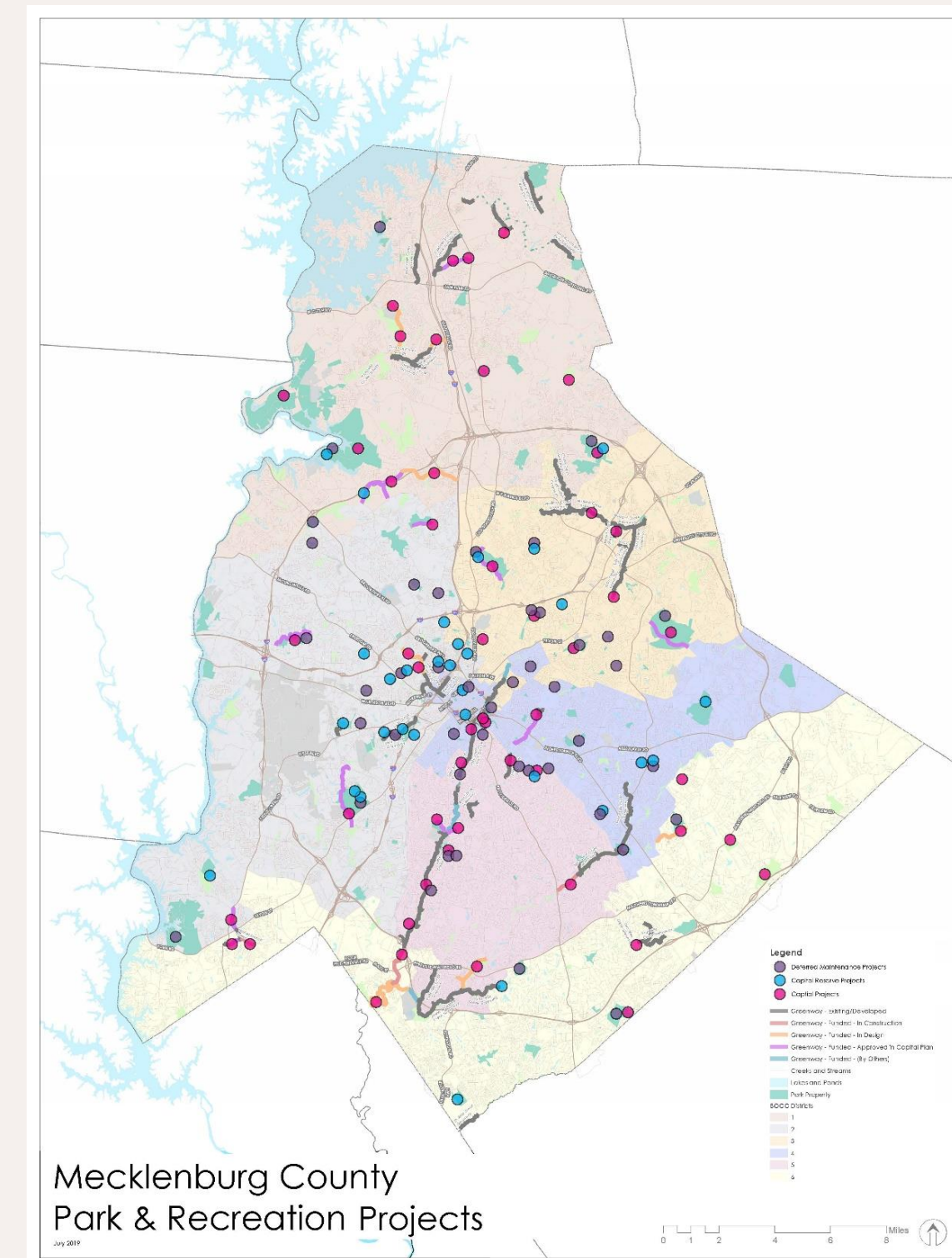
What is the CIP?

The CIP is a plan for Park and Recreation projects that runs on a five-year funding cycle. Funds are derived from a savings (Paygo) and Debt Payment account and allow for investment in long-term projects on a multiyear basis.

Equity & the CIP Process

Projects included in the CIP are selected in a geographically equitable fashion in order to serve as many areas residents as possible.

Recent CIP projects are displayed on this map, along with Deferred Maintenance and Capital Reserve Projects.





Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation

One-Time Funding Projects

We have leveraged the use of one-time funds to bridge gaps in smaller amenities and facilities not accounted for in the CIP. The one-time funding has also allowed us to equitably serve communities.

Recent One-Time Funding

The Department recently received Capital Reserve funding of \$3.875 Million and \$2 Million in FY20.

\$3.875M One-Time Allocation – Park Enhancements

- 10 Comprehensive Park Enhancements
- Baseball Dugouts at Revolution Park
- Athletic Field Lighting at Revolution and Winget Parks
- 4 Park Received New Fitness Equipment
- 8 Recreation Centers Received New Gym Floors
- Four Mile Creek Greenway & Harrisburg Road Park Received Restrooms
- Wayfinding at Latta Nature Preserve
- Boulders at Stevens Creek Nature Preserve
- Restroom Renovations at 5 Recreation Centers
- New Countertops at 4 Recreation Centers
- Archery Facilities at Abersham Park

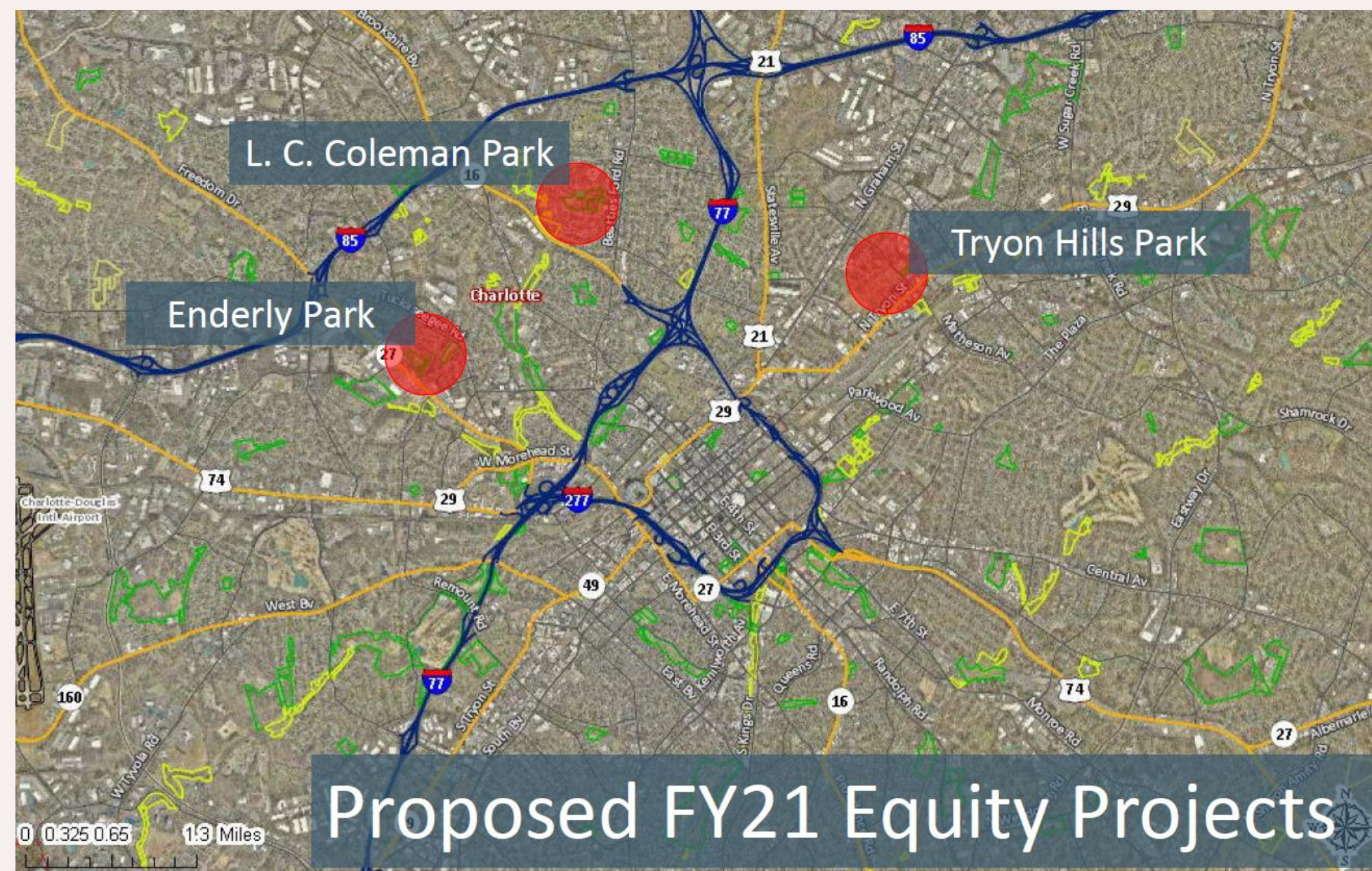
\$2M Equity Funding

Funded 3 Park Makeovers in Designated High Need Communities
Tryon Hills Park, Enderly Park and LC Coleman Park.

Estimated Cost to Reinvest in Underserved/"Poor" Condition Parks

D and F Parks Only: \$176,500,000

C, D and F Parks: \$332,500,000





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Operational Model

Current Operations: Parkland

Current Maintenance Standards & Practices

Our top priorities are ***Safety, Cleanliness*** and ***Functionality***.

General Park Maintenance

Community and Regional Parks are visited daily for routine maintenance.

Neighborhood Parks are visited 3-5/week.

Mowing

Mowing is a contracted service. Mowing contractors are sought every three years through a competitive, data-driven bidding process.

The number of contractor visits each site receives per year depends on weather, turf type and other conditions.

Repair Requests

Staff respond on an ad hoc basis to repair requests received from constituents through the website portal, social media and customer service emails and phone calls.

Deferred Maintenance (Transitioning to Routine Maintenance)

Deferred and Routine Maintenance for playgrounds, shelters, erosion issues and asphalt occur across the system. Prioritization is based on a Facility Condition Index based on the one used by the National Park Service calculated using the following variables: Facility Condition, Safety, Accessibility, Visitation, Security, Cost and Public Interest.

Capital Reserve Funding

Supplemental/incremental funding set aside for large projects such as HVAC, roof repair, or capital projects identified as critical. Both funding appropriations (\$2M and \$3.875M) featured on the One-Time Funding Projects slide were funded through Capital Reserve. Is often transferred to Park and Recreation from Asset and Facilities Management when they have additional money available.



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Operational Model

Natural Area Management & Preservation

Invasive Species

Initial removal and ongoing management of invasive species, including English ivy, kudzu, autumn olive and a variety of other plants and animals costs approximately \$1,500 – 3,000 per acre. Most of the department's current invasive species management efforts are contracted. There are approximately 5,500 acres system-wide (79% of park properties) acres of invasive species that require both initial treatment and ongoing management under the Department's purview.

With current funding levels of \$200,000/year over the past three years, Department staff have successfully treated hundred of acres of invasive species concentrated in identified priority zones. Identification of priority zones was based on public usage and severity of invasive activity, while ensuring that treatment occurred equitably across the County.

With current contract management operations, the Department can effectively allocate \$400,000 for increased invasive species management. Over the next three years, staff and contractors can work to increase the scope of operations to allocate up to \$1,000,000 per year by FY24. With an annual allocation of \$1,000,000, it is estimated that over 5,000 acres of invasive species could be treated by FY36 (15 years).

Prescribed Burning

Prescribed burns play an important role in natural areas management. Through the proactive treatment of identified areas with fire, we can improve wildlife habitat, enhance plant diversity and reduce invasive species cover.

Department staff currently endeavor to burn approximately 500-600 acres per year between January and March, depending on weather conditions. To maintain current operations, equipment upgrades of approximately \$32,000 are necessary.



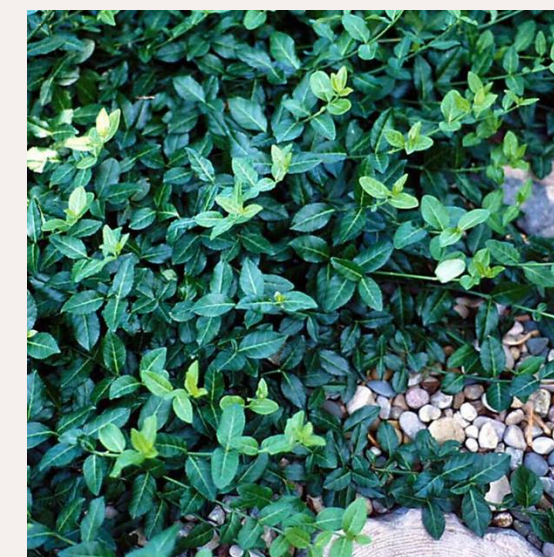
English Ivy



Japanese Honeysuckle



Autumn Olive

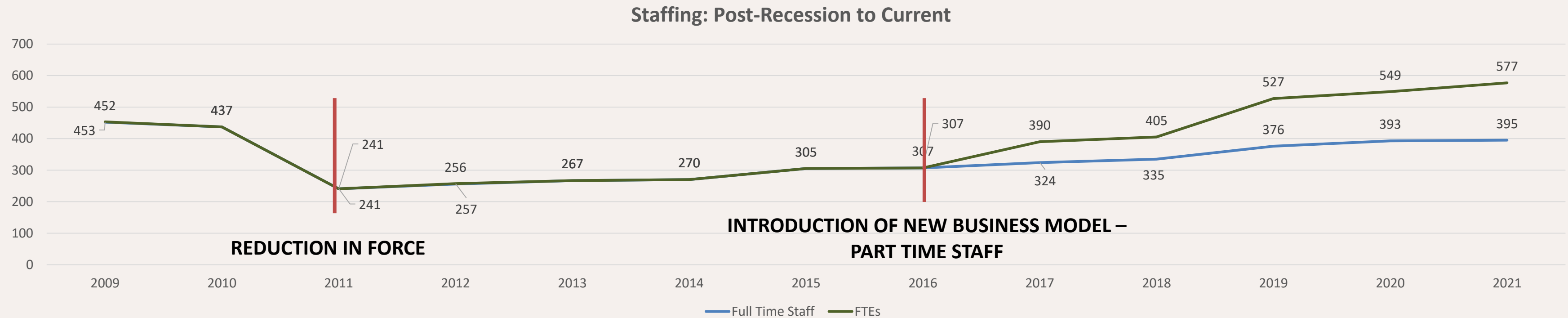


Winter Creeper



Operational Model

Current Operations



- Approximately **90%** of positions added to the Department between FY12 to current were within the Park Operations Division. Many of the positions added were through part-time positions.
- Of the **61** positions requested in the FY16 Park Operations Staffing Enhancement Plan, all have been funded to align to the new business model.
- Our current vacancy rate is **16.3%** for full-time positions. The following strategies are currently being utilized to fill these positions:
 - Marketing and promotion using social media;
 - Dedicated Human Resources Team for assistance with expediting the process of hiring for critical and recurring positions;
 - Park and Recreation Job Fairs;
 - Advertising in trade and professional publications and through local community colleges.

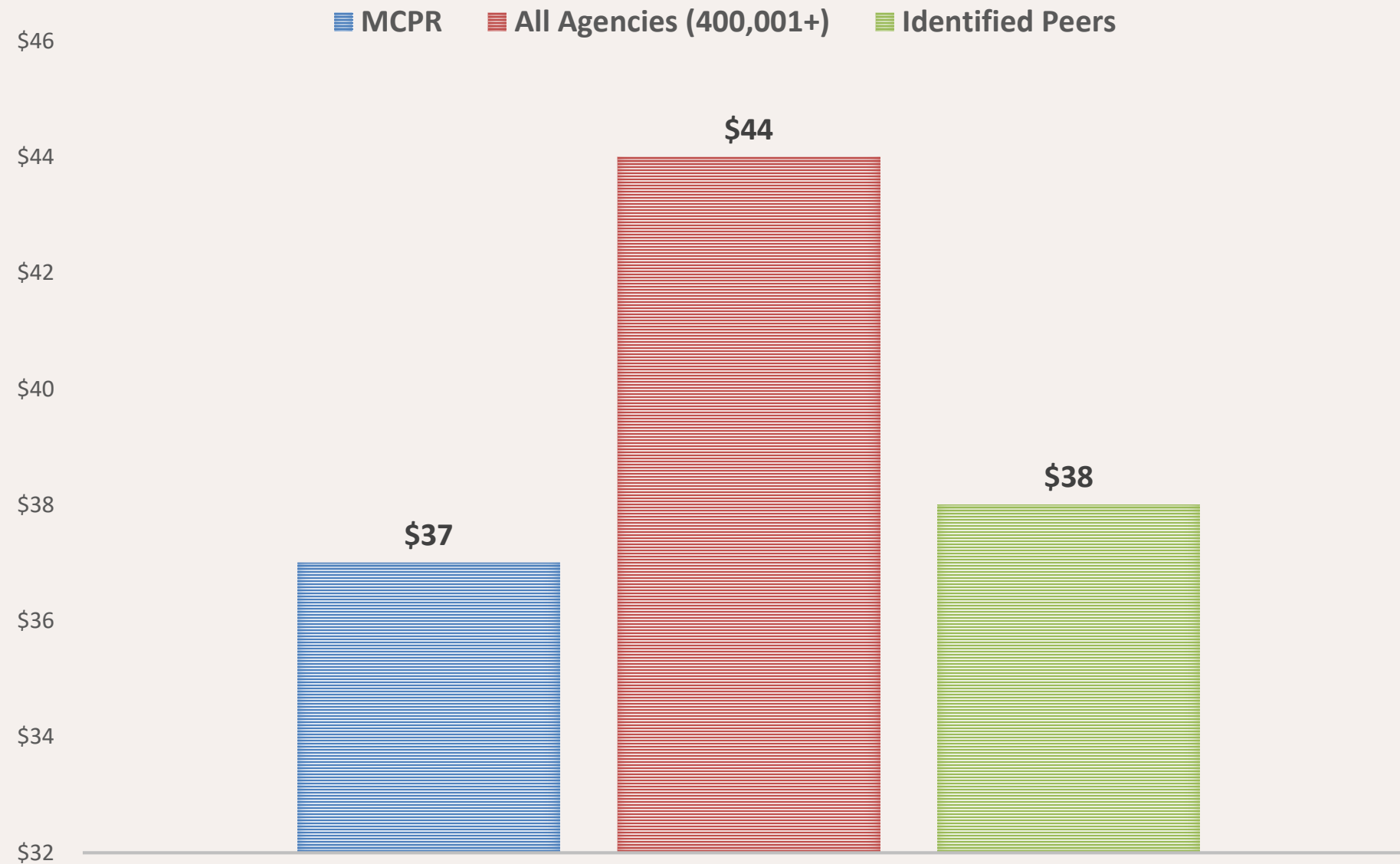


FTE (Full-Time Equivalent): Total number of staff positions converted into 40 hour/week units. Industry standard comparative unit.



Benchmarking *Operating Expenditures*

OPERATING EXPENDITURES PER CAPITA

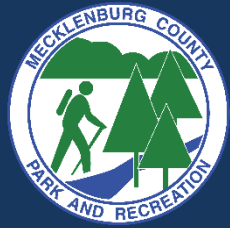


To bring the Department to par with **all agencies** of a similar jurisdiction size, an increase of **\$8,200,000** would be necessary.

To bring the Department to par with **identified peers**, an increase of **\$1,600,000** is necessary.

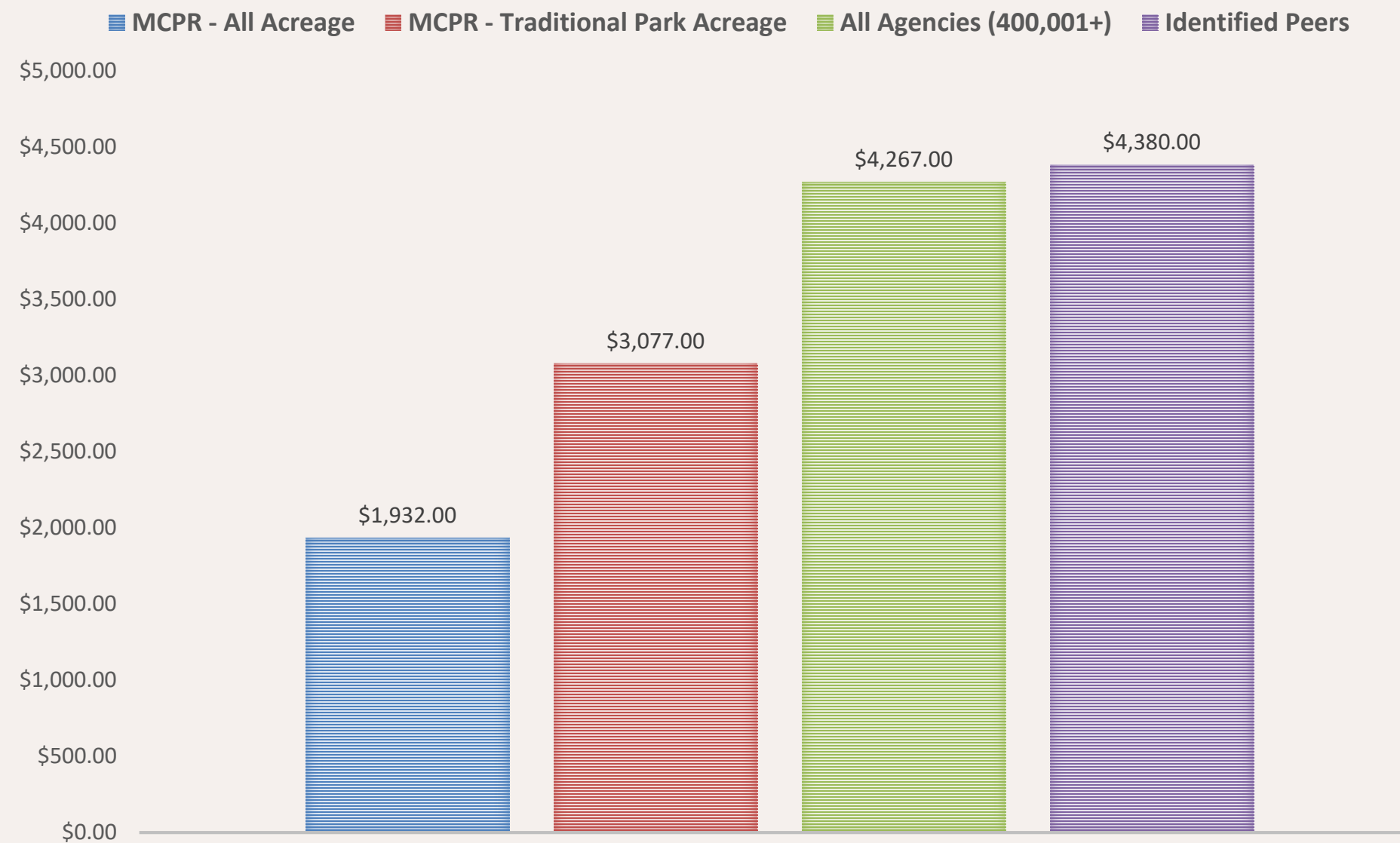
Peers: Five agencies identified by Meck Playbook consultant for similar population, density, size and region.

All Agencies: Population of 400,001+ is used as threshold for comparison with all agencies because it is an industry standard comparative unit.



Benchmarking *Operating Expenditures*

OPERATING EXPENDITURES PER ACRE



To bring the Department to par with **all agencies** of a similar jurisdiction size, an increase of **\$48M** (including all acreage in the calculation) or **\$15.5M** (including traditional park acreage only in the calculation) would be necessary.

To bring the Department to par with **identified peers**, an increase of **\$50,673,600** (including all acreage in the calculation) or **\$17M** (including traditional park acreage only in the calculation) is necessary.

Peers: Five agencies identified by Meck Playbook consultant for similar population, density, size and region.

All Agencies: Population of 400,001+ is used as threshold for comparison with all agencies because it is an industry standard comparative unit.

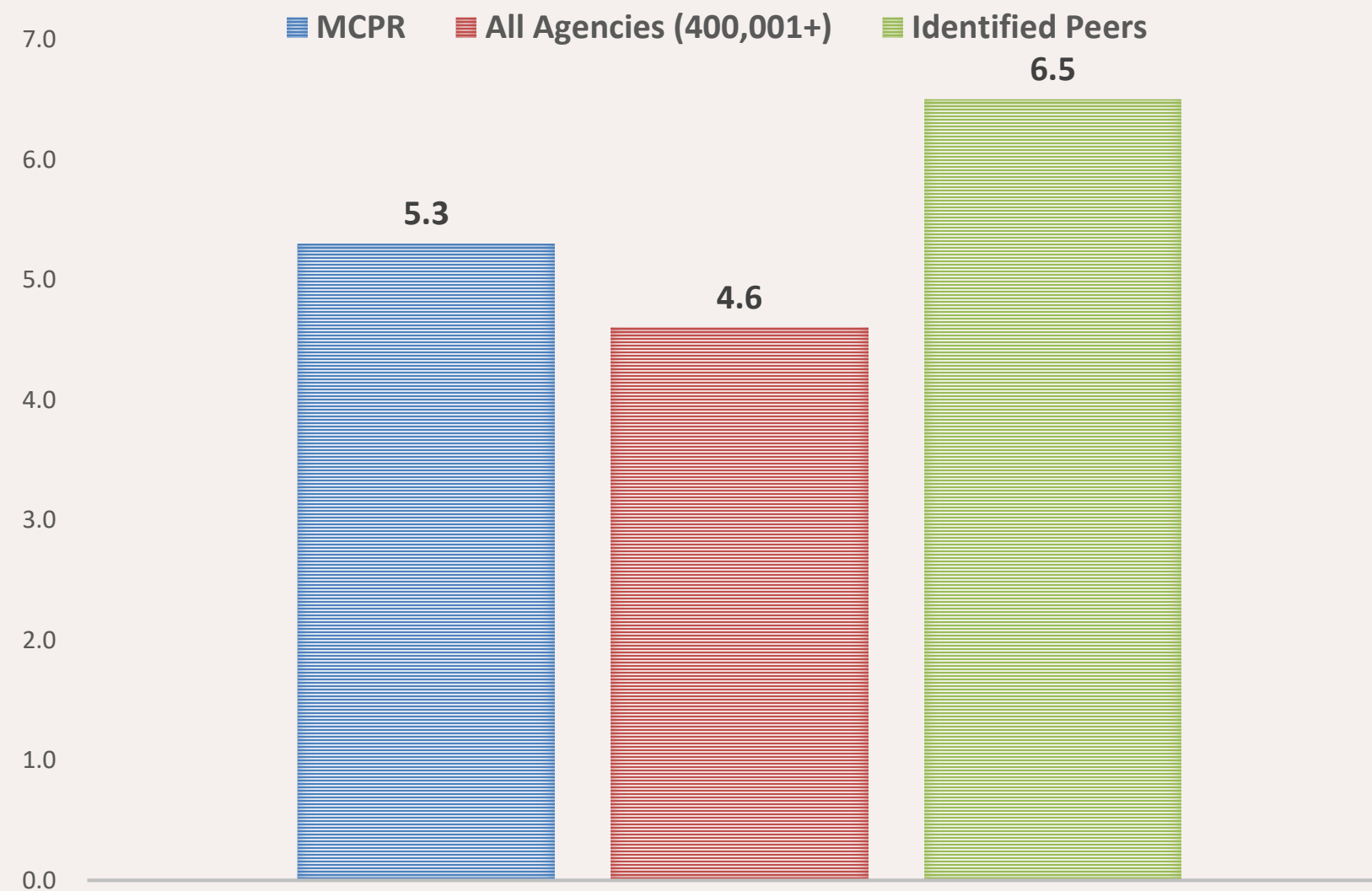
Traditional Park Acreage: Developed park acreage.



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Benchmarking *Staffing*

FULL TIME EQUIVALENT/10,000 POPULATION



To bring the Department to par with **all agencies** of a similar jurisdiction size, no increase in FTEs would be necessary.

To bring the Department to par with **identified peers**, an increase of **132 FTEs** is necessary.

Peers: Five agencies identified by Meck Playbook consultant for similar population, density, size and region.

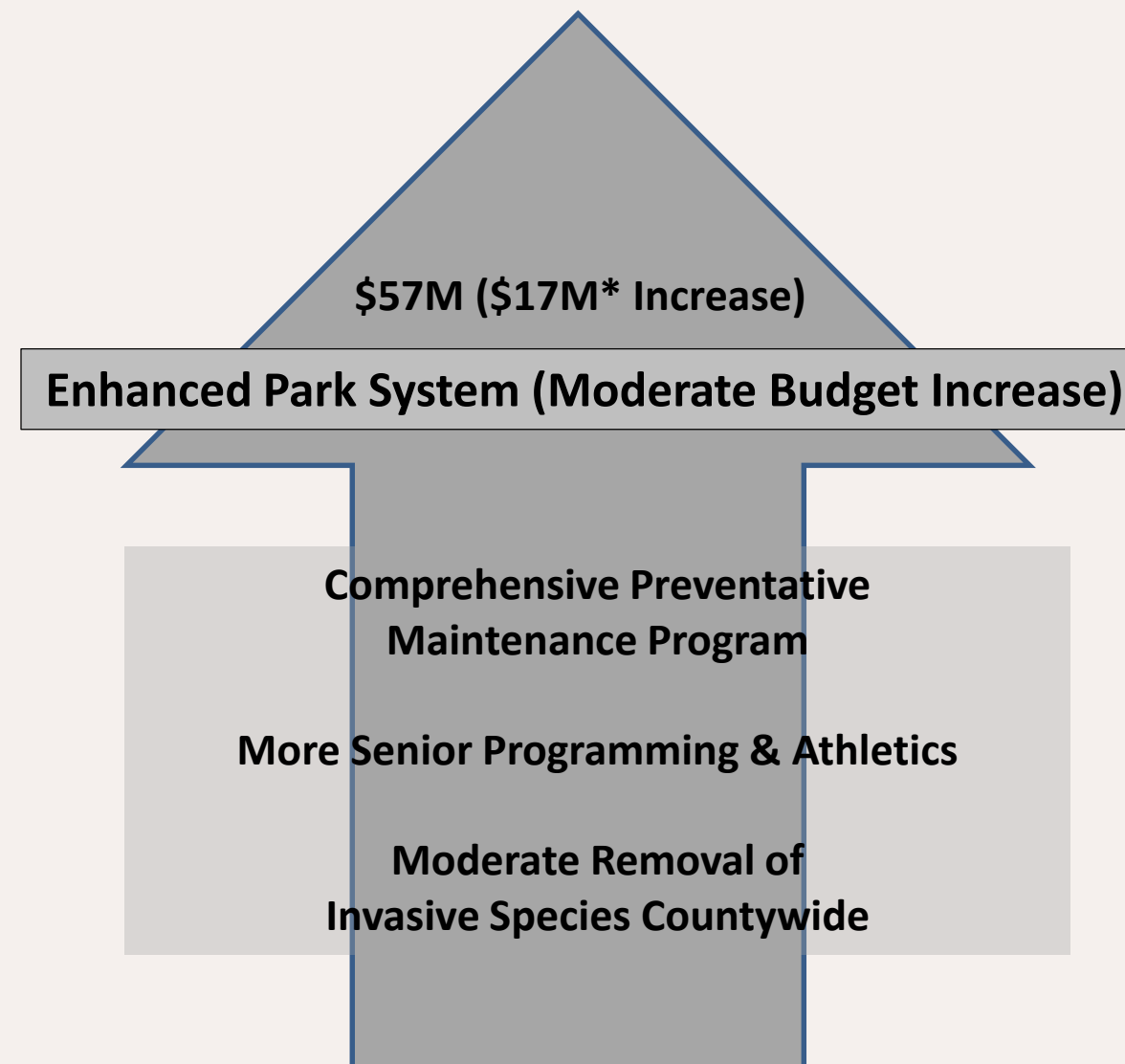
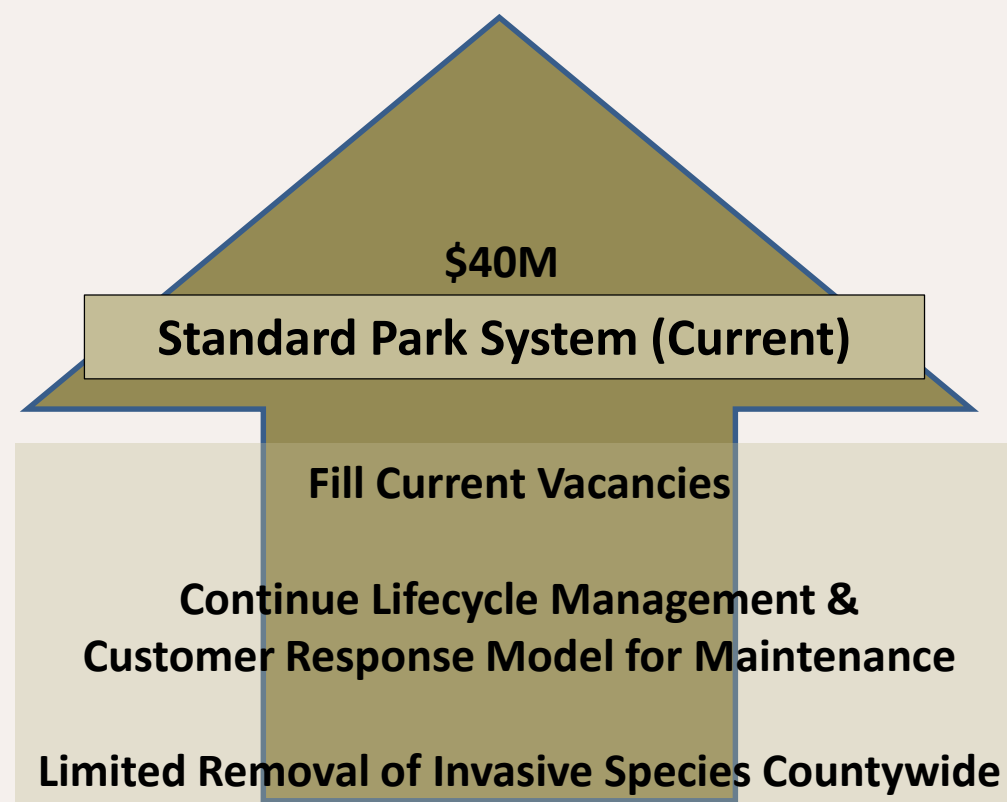
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Operational Model

“Standard, Enhanced, Showcase”

What Would Increased Funding Do?



* Funding aligns to peers.





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Feedback/Q&A

